



# Recommendations

## Enhancing Cultural Mealtimes in Long-Term and Residential Care

These recommendations are the outcome of a scoping review conducted by the University of Calgary Centre on Aging

By Erin Davis, Prangad Gupta, Chantelle Zimmer, and Jayna Holroyd-Leduc

# Enhancing Cultural Meal Services in Long-Term and Residential Care: Serving Diversity with Flavour and Care

The recommendations presented in this document focus on improving the cultural inclusivity of mealtimes in long-term care (LTC) and residential care facilities (RCF). By accommodating diverse dietary needs, food preferences, and cultural practices of residents from various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, care facilities can foster welcoming mealtime environments that honour cultural differences, enhance the dining experience, and contribute to residents' overall wellbeing.

Culturally inclusive mealtimes have been shown to improve resident satisfaction, promote healthier eating habits, and foster a greater sense of belonging. Recognizing and respecting the diverse culinary traditions of residents not only helps residents feel more comfortable and valued but also reduces risk of food-related conflicts and cultural insensitivity. Tailoring meal offerings to meet the cultural and dietary needs of residents ensures that all individuals feel supported and understood—a key aspect of person-centred care (PCC).

## Policy and System-Level Recommendations

1. Develop standardized policies for culturally inclusive meals in LTC and RCF facilities.
2. Mandate cultural meal accommodation as part of PCC rather than an optional feature.
3. Increase funding for culturally appropriate food services, ensuring access to diverse ingredients and meal preparation resources.
4. Incorporate cultural competency training, specific to meal services and menu items, into mandatory LTC staff education programs.
5. Encourage regulatory bodies to support flexible meal schedules that accommodate cultural dining practices.
6. Create objective compliance criteria for cultural meal services within LTC regulations.
7. Ensure policy language is clear and enforceable, preventing vague commitments that fail to be implemented.
8. Promote interdisciplinary collaboration among dietitians, food service staff, and community groups to develop culturally responsive meal plans.

9. Expand public awareness campaigns on the importance of culturally inclusive meals in LTC and RCF settings.

## Operational and Facility-Based Recommendations

1. Provide culturally tailored menu options based on resident demographics rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.
2. Incorporate culturally appropriate condiments, side dishes, and substitutions (e.g., rice in addition to potatoes; soy sauce, chili, vinegar).
3. Offer multilingual menus and communication aids to improve meal selection for non-English-speaking residents.
4. Encourage flexible dining arrangements that allow communal dining among residents with shared cultural backgrounds.
5. Offer flexible mealtimes to support inclusivity and comfort, ensuring residents can enjoy meals at a time that aligns with their cultural and social needs.
6. Create designated cultural dining spaces or themed meal nights to reflect diverse food traditions.
7. Ensure culturally meaningful meal presentation, including the use of traditional utensils and serving styles.
8. Address dietary modifications in a culturally sensitive way, ensuring texture-modified and low-sodium meals retain traditional flavors where possible.
9. Train kitchen staff in cultural food preparation techniques, using expert guidance from ethnic food specialists.
10. Encourage peer engagement by allowing residents to share meals in a culturally familiar setting to foster connection and wellbeing.

11. Establish partnerships with diaspora communities, local cultural organizations, and cultural food suppliers to ensure access to traditional ingredients and authentic food preparation techniques. These partnerships can also provide guidance on dietary customs, religious food requirements, and traditional cooking methods.
12. Establish partnerships with local chefs, culinary schools, and/or restaurants to provide culturally appropriate meals or education on proper cooking techniques and presentation.

## Family and Community Recommendations

1. Reduce reliance on families to provide culturally appropriate meals, shifting responsibility to the facility rather than placing undue burden on families.
2. Support formal family involvement in meal provision, including designated spaces for communal family dining.
3. Develop structured family-led meal programs, where families can co-host traditional meal events.
4. Allow resident and family participation in menu planning, including the submission of traditional recipes to create traditional food recipe books.

## Research, Quality Improvement, and Advocacy Recommendations

1. Conduct more studies on the impact of culturally inclusive meals on health outcomes and quality of life of residents.
2. Examine the feasibility of integrating cultural meal services into mainstream LTC and RCF settings, including cost-effectiveness studies.
3. Use resident feedback to continuously refine culturally inclusive meal programming.

4. Advocate for increased funding at the policy (and/or facility) level to ensure cultural meal services are sustainable and scalable.
5. Develop a regional/national framework for culturally inclusive food services in LTC and RCF, ensuring consistency across facilities.

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